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ABSTRACT

A variety of creative activities to stimulate elementary school children's curiosity and interest in the substance and structure of American English are listed in this paper. Over half of the 37 suggested activities refer to "Words, Words, Words" by Mary O'Neill and "The Language Book" by Franklyn Folsom. The other suggestions utilize additional books which are concerned with the use and origin of language. (JM)

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THE STORY OF LANGUAGE

by

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Introduction

The teacher can do many things to interest pupils in the substance and structure of American English. In most cases, the approach suggested by O'Neill in Words, Words, Words should be followed. English should be a wonderful game. Young elementary school children should be imbued with curiosity and an interest in the wonderful adventure of words. A few suggestions follow.

1. Read verses from Words, Words, Words by Mary O'Neill. Decorations by Judy Piussi-Campbell. New York: Doubleday, 1966. Encourage children to wonder about the first words which man might have created after reading "Nobody knows what the first Words were" (p.11)

2. Read "Alphabet" and "Consonants and Vowels", pages 10-11. Study chapter "Signs for Words" in the volume The Language Book by Franklyn Folsom. Illustrations by John Hull and Tran Mawicke. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1963. Let pupils create some simple forms of picture writing or sign writing similar to that used by the Sumerians, Egyptians, or from some of the Oriental languages.

3. Study the section "Language, From People for People" and let pupils use Greek or Roman Alphabet letters in some sort of a design. This could be done with potato printing, linoleum prints, stencils, or through wax printing.

4. Let intermediate grade children do research on Champollian. Read "The Case of the Missing Heirogyphs" page 82-86 in The Language Book.

5. Read the story "The Tower to Heaven" pages 94-95 of The Language Book. Talk about the Tower of Babel. Have children study Babylonian history and create a picture of the Tower of Babel. Do role playing and dramatize the problem of building an elaborate edifice without the use of any language. How can a boss give orders to others when there is no language?

6. Study symbols. Note symbols commonly used such as the cross for Christianity and the flag for a particular country. Let each child in the class select a different flag and do research on the country. Go through magazines and discover examples of use of symbols. For instance, Mercury symbolizes speed and the messenger of the gods and is used by florists; a particular type of shell is the one symbolized in Shell Oil Company advertisements.

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7. Geography and History - Make a language map in relation to the early discovery and exploration period of American history. Let students make different original symbols to represent English, French, Dutch, German, and Spanish explorers and settlers. Use these symbols to point up areas where various nationalities settled. Use a key and print a few words which might have been transmitted to our American Language from other people.

8. Study the section "How to Make a Language" from The Language Book. Carve out an imaginary country in some remote area of the world. Have pupils work on forty-three or four sound combinations of our language. Then, create some words and sentences for people in the new country.

9. Read "The Very Big Word Plan" in The Language Book. Create some big words by combining parts of other words into a large word in a meaningful manner.

10. Read about the significance of communication in the United Nations in the section "At the United Nations" pages 133-136 of The Language Book. Do research on the United Nations and find out more about the significance of language in this organizations operations.

11. Study the Morse Code, International Signal Flags, and the Semaphore Alphabet.

12. Do research on Esperanto and Interleagua. A little information is given in The Language Book.

13. Study about language and war and peace. Pages 152-155 of The Language Book.

14. Work on common phrases of six languages which appear on pages 160-161 of The Language Book. Practice communicating with one another through the use of these simple phrases.

15. Play some of the word games which are on pages 175-186 of The Language Book. These include Doublet, gossip, teakettle, palindromes and others.

16. Read verses "A Sentence," "Phrase," "Interjection," "Paragraph," "Verbs," "Noun," "Preposition," "Pronouns," "Conjunctions," and "Adjectives," from Words, Words, Words by Mary O'Neill. Have pupils create original poems or verses to explain the function of a part of speech, sentence or paragraph.

17. Read the poem "Antonyms, Synonyms and Homonyms" from O'Neill's Words, Words, Words. Divide the class into three committees. Have each committee make a collection of one of these types of words.

18. Read the poem "Feelings About Words" from O'Neill's Words, Words, Words. Ask children to list ten words which are happy words and ten words which are sad words. Dr. Wilfred Funk has listed the most beautiful words in English as tranquil, golden, hush, bobolink, thrush, lullaby, chimes, murmuring, luminous, damask, cerulean, melody, marigold, jonquil, oriole, tendril, myrrh, mignonette, gossamer, fawn, dawn, chalice, anemone, alyseum mist, oleander, amaryllis, rosemary, camellia, asphodel, and halcyon. (Quoted in The Magic and Mystery of Words by J. Donald Adams. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, p. 24)

19. Read Ounce, Dice, Trice by Alastair Re d. Drawings by Ben Shahn. Boston: Little, Brown, 1958. Ask young children to create zzz words or words which sound like someone sleeping. Or, create light words or words which can be sung in a song, or heavy words. Develop lists or words which show various ways people can move. Reid says you can "flit, fluctuate, wobble, wiggle, shiver, pirouette, or twirl."

20. Study Words on the Map by Isaac Asimov. Decorations by William Barss. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1962. Make a map on a large bulletin board. Choose a few locations discussed in the book. Discuss the origin of the word and use colored cord or thumb tacks to mark off the word studied. Do the same technique with Names on the Land by George Stewart. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1951.

21. Study Words of Science and the History behind them by Isaac Asimov. Illustrated by William Barss. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959. Have a committee of gifted pupils study this volume and list scientific terms which have come into our language during the past fifty years. Also list the country which was principally responsible for the origin of the name.

22. Read different chapters of the volume.

    a. General Language, English and Its Foreign Relations by Lilly Lindquist and Clarence Wachner. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962. Study Chapter 5, "Place Names of Our Country". Find a map which lists several names. This can be one of the maps issued by the airlines. Give the origin of some of the names.

    b. Read Chapter 7 "Your Language and Mine and How It Came to Be." Make a time line map showing the changing periods of the English language.

23. Read Chapter three "The Melting Pot" of Marckwardt's American English. New York: Oxford University Press, 1958. Select five committees of the class to prepare parallel columns of foods, plants and animals, toponymics, social, or other classifications. Each committee will make five columns showing the contributions of each of five groups of people in this area.

24. Page 129-130 of the volume General Language English and Its Foreign Relations by Lindquist and Wachner have an international menu. Have pupils create an international menu using at least five different foods. Go to restaurants which serve foreign foods and make a collection of foreign words which are used in our vocabularies.

25. Read the section "Artificial Languages" from Lindquist and Wachner, pages 139-141. Study some of the principles of the Esperanto language. Create some nouns, adjectives and verbs in Esperanto.

26. The following quotation uses words from twenty different languages:

"On Wednesday the ugly thing loafed at a damask-covered table on the cafe balcony eating goulash and drinking hot chocolate with a half-caste brunette in a kimono-sleeved gown and a crimson angora-wool shawl. Meanwhile, on the back of the paper menu he deciphered a code notation from a canny smuggler of silk cargoes." P. 49 of Lindquist and Wachner, General Language, English and Its Foreign Relations.

Ugly smuggler	-	Icelandic
thug	-	Hindu
loafed	-	German
cafe	-	French
shawl	-	Persian

Ask pupils to create a paragraph or story using at least ten words from ten different foreign languages.

27. Winning Words by Henry I. Christ. Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1963 includes hundreds of suggestions on ways to interest pupils in words. This book was designed for secondary school pupils but many of these lessons may be adapted for use by elementary school pupils.

28. Words and What They Do To You by Catherine Minteer, Evanston, Illinois. Row, Peterson and Co., 1953 includes some lessons in semantics designed for junior high school pupils. Some of these lessons can be adapted for the elementary school level.

29. Make a scrapbook called Words Magic or Adventures With Words. Show words which are spelled the same but have different meanings in different contexts. For instance, there are at least 21 different uses for the word run.

30. Read A Dictionary Is Born by Ruth K. Carlson in Elementary English, April, 1964. Select some new words which are being coined currently. Go through the steps which lexicographers do in creating new words.

31. Work through some of the sections of Good Times With Words by Ruth Shaw Redlauer. Illustrated by Gene Holtan. Chicago: Melmont, 1963.

    a. Using words to show the shape and size of things - Similes, pages 11-16

    b. Color words, page 17

31. (continued)

c. Words showing action and movement - pages 19-24

d. Sounds into Words Pictures, pages 25-27

e. Multi sensory use of words

1. smells - 29
2. taste - 30
3. tochite - 33

f. Feelings and emotions - 37-45

32. Read The First Book of Words and Their Family Histories. Pictures by Laszlo Roth. New York: Franklin Watts, 1954. Do some activities with sections of this book.

a. Make a word map in which you place some word origins on the map.

b. Make two parallel columns in which you show relationships between two languages.

1. German - English
2. Swedish - English
3. Spanish - English

c. Write an original story or paragraph using picture writing or ideographs for some of the words.

d. Invent some new words logically through using a basic root word or an affix or both.

e. Get some newspapers and magazines and collect words which are brand names such as Mazda, Pyrex, and Frigidaire.

f. After reading section on "Words that Sound Like What They Mean," develop some onomatapoetic words.

33. Study The Tree of Language by Helen and Charlton Laird. Illus. by Ervine Metzl. Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1957.

a. Do some activities in relation to the onomatopoetic words on pages 84-85.

b. After reading pages 88-89 on homonyms - develop a collection of hononyms.

c. The Lairds point out on pages 89-90 that snth words sound unpleasant. Use a college dictionary and make a list of some more sn words which have unpleasant connotations. Find some additional sn words which have pleasant associations.

33. (continued)

d. From Thoughts to Words by Marlene Glaus (National Council of Teachers of English) and the Laird book show various ways that we mean groups such as a "Pod of whales" and a "covey of quails or partridges." Collect some words which mean groups.

e. Use some other books about word origins. Write and illustrate some word histories.

34. Read Origins of Language by L. J. Ludovici. New York: G. Putnam's Sons, 1965. Select one period of history such as the time of the Anglos and Saxons, the Doves, the Norman Conquest, or Chaucer's time. Use an encyclopedia or some history books. Prepare a report using historical and linguistic facts.

35. Write an original language poem or some quatrains or couplets similar to ones used by Mary O'Neill in Words, Words, Words or Eve Merriam in It Doesn't Always Have to Rhyme (New York: Atheneum, 1964).

36. Create an original crossword puzzle using some foreign words from which American words have been coined.

37. Share the fantasy The Phantom Tollbooth by Norton Juster. (Illus. by Jules Pheiffer. New York: Random House, 1965.) Do some dramatizations of certain sections of this book or read "Dictionopolis" by Joan Joy and Marilyn Potter. Elementary English, April, 1964, pages 351-361. Establish some word booths in the classroom where words can be bought and sold.